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LOCAL OWNERSHIP ON NON-MILITARY CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

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Thanks for inviting me to speak on this panel.

As I work for Kvinna till Kvinna (woman to woman) my point of view is from the work we are doing – focusing on support to women organizations in conflict and post conflict regions. Today we work together with around 120 women organizations in the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Middle East and Liberia and DRC.

OSCE has an enormous asset in your field presence when it comes to confidence building measures – and information gathering. Working in Bosnia in the end of the 90's I could see firsthand some of the OSCE field work. One thing that was so much more important than I think was even understood by the OSCE at the time was that you as an organization helped with transport over the different "enemy lines" during the years just after the peace accord was signed. Several of our partner organizations have stated this as an important enabler for them to be able to meet over entity lines and to be able to bring back new information to their members and also to their beneficiaries.

For us the local ownership is of greatest essence, and as we are working with women organizations that they are forming their program local ownership is also ensured.

CBM

According to the experience of Kvinna till Kvinna it all comes down to open up ways of communication. A post conflict setting is a very good place for nourishing a lot of gossip and misunderstandings. There is also often a lack of trust between authorities and citizens. That is why it is so important with confidence building measures. If there are rumours of lots of money and no one knows where the money is going this is something that will counteract any confidence building between authorities and their citizens.

To build rule of law and democracy there is a need for transparency, information flow and open communication. That could, for instance, be to create places for the different stake holders to meet and discuss, or create ways of communicating new information to the population.

We at Kvinna till Kvinna work a lot with networking as a tool.

Examples of CBM

Some examples from the civil society perspectives:

*) Correction due to change of distribution status

KOSOVO: One of our partner organizations, Ruka Ruci, monitors the municipality and organize also round tables with the politicians. This is because there is a lot of questions around the money people know is there – and the money people think might be there. A lot of questions about “why are they getting money and not us?” . Through their monitoring work Ruka Ruci is able to give answer to those questions and also to give out information and in this way they can also build trust for the authorities.

BOSNIA: A women organization in Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina had during a period an activity they called “Coffee with the Mayor”. They invited local politicians (and even the mayor) to come and meet women in their office. It was an opportunity for the women to ask questions and to also bring up problems with the people who were elected to tend to the citizens needs. Through this activity the women could bring to the Mayors attention that there was a need to have school rides. A problem that they also found a solution to. This is both a form of direct democracy – as well as empowering activity as the women felt like they actually could change their everyday life to the better. And that the politicians actually listen to them.

DRC: Open up for discussion and find a platform where all stake holders will listen to each other. Kvinna till Kvinna organized a conference on the subject of reintegrating victims of sexual violence into the society. We brought together civil society and authorities (traditional, local, regional and national). It was, according to the participants, the first time they sat and discussed and actually listened to each other.

GEORGIA: Long-term work will give results

But it is not without risks. As one women’s rights activist said in November 2006:

“We are working with hidden danger. I do not think about it all the time but I am shocked when facing angry men if I say that I am working for an NGO “Ah, you are on the foreigners pay list, when they go we will get rid of you”.We opened a whole new world that did not exist here before - so everyone is suspicious of our work. This could be used against us. Therefore we need to build a strong network to survive, not only to help some women but to preserve civil society so that others do not have to start from the same point that we did. It is a democratization process.”

Women human right defenders are often at risk. They are working for change, and in a post conflict setting that often includes being called a traitor and being threatened.

The silence and inability of public authorities to prosecute the perpetrators indirectly supports the violations. That is why the greatest threat to women's rights activists is the lack of recognition.

International community

It is also the responsibility of the international community – of all of us – to not ignore the work that the WHRD are doing – to make them invisible and by that put them at greater risk. Acknowledgement is key because these women are essential for confidence building measures.

In a conflict or post-conflict situation, we must ask ourselves, whether we are representatives of the UN, the OSCE or an NGO:

Who owns a problem? On what information do we base our analysis?

For example when we deal with “security” – who’s security are we talking about?

As mentioned before it is important to open up places for communication. The international community can provide this.

- To provide space for meetings
- To organize meetings between authorities and civil society
- To be the bearer of information
- Who are we giving information? Who are we getting information from?
- To help with transport
- To ensure security for human rights defenders when at risk
- To be patient enough to actually NOT set the agenda.
- When having meetings make sure to have several stakeholders there – and then especially women
- Meet with women’s organizations
- We have asked our partner organization what information they would like to have from the international community – and what information they would like to give. One thing they really would like to know is the mandate of the different international organizations – and to have feedback on how information they give will be used and for what. Confidence building measures for us.
- Make sure to share best and worst practices so that we can learn from what is already done.

Let me give you one bad example: New wells were needed in Kosovo after the NATO bombings. In a remote village the community leaders were thoroughly consulted, since local ownership of development projects is important. The location of the well was debated and the decision by the representatives of community was to locate it a bit outside the village. Why? It was conveniently close to the car-wash where the men used to wash their cars.

Women need safe havens - *rooms of their own*- to use Virginia Wolf’s expression - in order to heal, meet, talk, strategize and organize for change – and therefore also be better agents for confidence building measures. International organizations can provide this!

Recommendations

Enabling meeting without setting the agenda? Is that possible?

To make sure to not continue to spread rumours, make sure to check if there is anything behind what is said (like rumours about kidnapping girls on the way to school in Albania etc)

Women are marginalized from decision-making and power hierarchies in large parts of the world, and therefore they choose other routes to political influence. And we in the international community have to acknowledge that.

And of course we want more and stronger support for women’s organizations, both politically and finically.